

Environment and Communications References Committee

Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program

Answers to questions on notice following hearing of 21 September 2018

1. Are there any obligations on the Foundation to fund the science and technology emerging from the Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program scoping exercise?

ANSWER:

The Foundation's work on Restoration and Adaptation will draw directly on the outcomes of the 'scoping' exercise. This 'scoping' exercise is a collaboration between AIMS, CSIRO, James Cook University, University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and the Foundation. Therefore, we expect it will strongly inform the Foundation's expenditure of the \$100 million allocated for reef restoration and adaptation science activities.

2. Did the Department meet with the Foundation's Anna Marsden on 8 March 2018?
 - a. What was the purpose of this meeting?

ANSWER:

Yes. The Department had a teleconference with Anna Marsden on 8 March 2018. The purpose of this teleconference was to gather information about the Foundation's governance and project management arrangements.

3. Did the Department assess the risks and sensitivities of the proposed \$5m grant?
 - a. When was that assessment completed?
 - b. What was the department's assessment of the risks and sensitivities?
4. Did the assessment include collecting any information from the Foundation about its operations?
 - a. If so, what did that include?
 - b. Did it include Anna Marsden providing the Department a statement of the 'Objects of the GBRF'?
 - c. Any other documents?

ANSWER:

The Department conducted a risk assessment as part of its project planning for the development of the grant. The Department determined that the risks and sensitivities of the grant were 'low'. The risk assessment is a standard internal analysis conducted by the Department to evaluate project risks. The risk assessment was informed by the project proposal submitted by the Foundation.

5. When did the Department recommend it be approved?
 - a. When did the Minister sign and approve the grant

ANSWER:

The Department submitted a brief for the Minister's consideration on 21 March 2018. The Minister approved the grant on 4 April 2018.

6. Did the Minister take this grant to the expenditure review committee?

ANSWER:

No. The Minister did not take this grant to the expenditure review committee as the funds came from the existing Reef Trust appropriation. This appropriation was approved through previous budget process and is the responsibility of the Department to administer.

7. At the hearing, Senator Keneally asked:

Senator KENEALLY: ... You asked Ms Marsden to give you, in her own words, a summary of the projects that you were investing in with them. So you do have a list of the projects that you were investing in with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation prior to this announcement?

Mr Oxley: Yes, of course, Senator.

Senator KENEALLY: Do you have it with you? In the interests of time, I'm happy to put that on notice and you can table it.

Mr Oxley: We're happy to provide it on notice, Senator, but we could give it to you now if you wish.

Will the Department tender the above document?

ANSWER:

The following grants have been provided by the Department to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation over the period 2013-14 to 2022-23:

- \$12.5 million for the Resilient Reefs Successfully Adapting to Climate Change research program (2013-14 to 2016-17).
- \$2.3 million for the e-Reefs modelling and reporting tool (2016-17 to 2019-20).
- \$5 million for restoration and conservation of Reef Islands (2018-19 to 2022-23) (approved but not yet contracted).

8. At the hearing Senator Keneally asked:

Senator KENEALLY: But did the students come from Townsville or Cairns?

Mr Oxley: If you would like to know the answer to the question, 'Where did the Children come from?' we will ask for you and bring an answer back to the committee.

Where were the students from?

- a. If they were from Townsville, who paid for their travel and accommodation arrangements?

ANSWER:

The students were from a school in Cairns that participates in the Reef Guardian Schools program.

9. In March 2018 a dossier was submitted to the Department of the Environment and Energy and the Australian Federal Police revealing a potential unexplained appropriation of Commonwealth funds in relation to the Crown of Thorns Starfish eradication program. Media reports indicate that the dossier appears to have revealed some information that has caused the Department of the Environment and Energy to shift funding from the great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation

Has this (suspected) unexplained appropriation of funds caused the Department to make new arrangements with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation?

ANSWER:

We have reviewed this 'dossier' and concluded that there are no fraud related issues requiring further action by the department.

The decision to provide a grant to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation was made by the Government as part of the 2018-19 budget process, and was not informed by any purported 'dossier'.